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by Robert Martinez 17th Training Wing Public Affairs

7/10/2009 - GOODFELLOW AFB, Texas -- A rocket attack left him without legs and a right arm. The attack came at Joint Balad Air Base on Sept. 11, 2004. His story has been chronicled in the Airman Quarterly Summer 2005 issue, numerous newspapers, online magazines, patriotic websites, medical magazines and even a video produced by Air Force media called "Alive Day" praising him for his courage and determination.

Brian Kolfage Jr., former 17th Security Forces Squadron defender now retired senior airman, was invited back to Goodfellow by Capt. Brian Copper, 17 SFS operations officer to speak to the 17 SFS Airmen and Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets on July 2 about his experience on that unforgettable day almost 5 years ago.

Capt. Copper introduced Brian as a hero and said he wanted Brian to speak to some of the Airmen and cadets because Brian inspired him. Capt. Copper said "I was inspired by Brian's struggles, determination and his sense of humor and positive outlook."

With tossed up brown hair and sunglasses propped on top of his head, he looks like any other young red-blooded American, 20-something, attending college. He's wearing an Arizona University t-shirt with "student" across the

chest and a big smile on his face. Brian began his presentation by telling the audience that he's not a public speaker but as he spoke, his presence and delivery proved otherwise.

A slide show accompanied his story, filled with images from his deployments and eventually a slide that warned about the upcoming graphic photos from the day he was injured. Brian said "If you can't stomach graphic images of blood, now is the time to turn away." He described exactly what happened to him on Sept. 11, 2004; some from what he recalled and most from what others, the medical personnel, told him.

His injuries were documented and the images showed the massive injuries he sustained once he arrived at the Balad Combat Support Hospital. One of the few moments he does remember was when he wanted to see how bad his injuries were. "I tried to look at my legs -- I sat up a little bit -- and they just put their hands in front of my eyes so I wouldn't see," he said.

Another moment he remembers is seeing what he called his angels. Angels who he said would not let him have water. These angels were nurses who were assisting him and denied him water in preparation for surgery.

Senior Master Sgt. Annett Whitenack, 17th Medical Group superintendent was one of the first medical responders to come to his aid that day and sat in the audience. She was the deployed BCSH OB/GYN non-commissioned officer in charge and was also on the emergency medical response team.

She remembers vividly coming to Brian's aid. "Most of the medical experts did not think he would live," she said. "He looked so grey" she remembers "and when I dream about the incident, I always see him as grey." "I came here for closure and wanted to see how he was doing now," she said. As the presentation ended, we saw images of Brian's recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center rehabilitating and determined to use his prosthetics. It wraps up with the video "Alive Day," showing him snowboarding, water skiing and goofing around. There is no one with his level of amputation that has ever been able to walk independently and he is still the most severely wounded Airman to survive any war.

Brian has shown incredible strength and courage through the years and continues to have a positive attitude about all things he decides to do. Today he uses his prosthetic legs full time, which exceeded the physical limits and is excelling prosthetic technology for future amputees. He drives a black customized Range Rover, with 24 inch, low profile rims and tinted windows. The SUV is equipped to drive with his hands, because, as he says "I'd drive it all crazy with these legs." He's also working toward an architectural degree from the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona.

After the presentation he stayed around to shake hands and talk to people. One of those who stayed longer was Senior Master Sgt. Whitenack. They sat alone and she told him things he did not know about the day he was injured. She tells Brian she wanted to see for herself how well he was doing with the injuries and life in general.

"He's doing great considering all he's had to endure," she said "but most of all, he's a happy person who's decided he wanted to have a great life regardless of all his challenges." She was, coincidently, one of those angels he begged for water. Seeing him again almost five years later will also change her dreams. "Now, when I dream about Brian and the incident that almost killed him, I won't see him as grey," she said "now I will see him with color."

Photos 1 of 2

Whitenack was one of the first medical responders on scene after he was injured. (U.S. Air Force photo by Robert Martinez)

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Brian Kolfage, former 17th Security Forces Squadron defender now retired Senior Airman, speaks to Senior Master Sgt. Annette Whitenack at Goodfellow AFB, Texas, July 2. Mr. Kolfage spoke about his experience on Sept. 11, 2004, a rocket attack left him without legs and a right arm. Senior Master Sgt

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